

Chapter

1

LIVABLE COMMUNITIES HANDBOOK

Land Use and Design Strategies for the South Bay Cities

Introduction and Background

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This handbook provides a roadmap for improving the livability of the South Bay. It includes land use strategies, design principles and implementation tools for making the communities of the South Bay subregion more livable places, and discusses the transportation and environmental benefits of these strategies. Cities can use this handbook in their efforts to create commercial and public spaces that are attractive, safe and economically healthy, expand transportation choices for all residents and reduce dependency on automobile use, provide a variety of housing opportunities, reduce natural resource use and environmental degradation, and foster a greater sense of community identity and pride.

The South Bay subregion consists of 16 cities in southwestern Los Angeles County. The cities are Carson, El Segundo, Gardena, Hawthorne, Hermosa Beach, Inglewood, Lawndale, Lomita, Manhattan Beach, Palos Verdes Estates, Rancho Palos Verdes, Redondo Beach, Rolling Hills, Rolling Hills Estates, Torrance, and the San Pedro and Harbor City areas of the City of Los Angeles. Most development in these cities occurred in the 1950's and 60's, though some contain historic areas.

Today the subregion is essentially built-out and the opportunities for changing the urban form are primarily through redevelopment. While some bus and light rail service is available, automobile dependency is high. A network of arterial streets crisscrosses the region, much of it lined with commercial strip centers. Off the busy arterials, single family homes and multi-family buildings provide the bulk of the subregion's housing. The proximity to Los Angeles International Airport and the seaports of Long Beach and Los Angeles has also led to local industrial development, and a number of the South Bay cities contain heavy and light industry.

DEFINITION

The term "livable communities" has taken on a variety of meanings in recent years. In this document, the use of the term is consistent with the definition developed by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). SCAG defines livable communities as having the following eight elements:

Design – Streets, buildings and public spaces should be designed to human scale so that pedestrian access is ensured. Urban design should be used to enhance safety, prosperity and beauty, while preserving links to natural, cultural and architectural history.

Center Focus – A community is strengthened by an economically healthy town center or downtown combining commercial, cultural, civic and recreational uses. The center should be linked to both local and regional public transportation systems. Residential neighborhoods also benefit from an appropriately-scaled center focus that enhances neighborhood identity and character.

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Public Spaces – Livable communities require open spaces that serve the entire community in the form of parks, squares and greens. Boulevards, streets, and paths should also be designed to be beautiful pleasant places. Public spaces should be designed to encourage their use throughout the day and into the night, making them safer and more of a community asset.

Balanced Transportation – The transportation system should balance pedestrian, transit, and auto access to reduce dependence on autos and provide secure, convenient and affordable mobility for all citizens. Compact land use patterns improve access to jobs, recreation, shopping and community services for all ages and incomes. Streets, pedestrian and bike paths are linked in a system of fully-connected and interesting routes to all destinations.

Diversity – Livable communities contain a mix of housing and employment opportunities for citizens from all ages, ethnicities and incomes. Civic facilities and services reflect the needs of the residents.

Environmental Sustainability – Livable communities conserve resources, natural habitat and air quality so as not to jeopardize the quality of life of future generations. Energy conservation is encouraged by the design and placement of buildings, shading and landscaping.

Public Safety – Livable communities are places where streets, buildings and public spaces are designed to human scale so that pedestrian safety is ensured. Safer neighborhoods improve the quality of life, add to the attractiveness of a community, and create a sense of identity and place.

Full Community Participation – Livable communities come from the full participation of residents, neighborhood organizations and the business community. Information and education about planning, land use and transportation issues and policies are readily available to promote involvement in decision-making.

BACKGROUND

This handbook builds on several previous efforts to promote livable communities in the South Bay. The *South Bay Livable Communities Initiative* began in 1994 with a one-day conference. Presentations, a Visual Preference Survey, and break-out groups were used to introduce the concepts of livable communities. The conference helped to identify and develop consensus statements on important issues in the South Bay.

A second conference, *Making Livable Communities: Next Step for the South Bay*, was held in 1996. This conference focused on applying livable communities concepts to three case studies within the South Bay – a commercial development site on a busy arterial street, an older downtown area, and a residential infill site near a Green Line station. These

three sites were considered representative of much of the South Bay subregion and offered the greatest opportunity to benefit from livable communities concepts.

After the 1996 conference, a series of presentations was made to South Bay individual cities. A slide show was prepared and delivered to elected officials and city staff. The purpose of the presentations was to provide local decision makers with a package of information and tools that would assist them in incorporating the principles of livable communities in their land use decision-making process.

This handbook is intended to shift the efforts from education on livable communities concepts to the implementation of specific strategies. It provides a set of land use strategies, design principles and implementation tools to achieve livable communities in the South Bay. The strategies focus on two urban form types found throughout the subregion that offer the greatest opportunity for improvement – arterial commercial strips and light industrial areas. The handbook also describes the transportation and environmental benefits of livable communities in terms of reduction in automobile use, reduction in pollutant emissions, and reduction in urban temperatures.

While many of the concepts presented here are not new, the handbook synthesizes a wide variety of information from three major fields: land use, architecture and urban design; development, regulation and funding; and analytical transportation and environmental research. The handbook tailors this information to the specific conditions of the South Bay.

METHODOLOGY

The concepts in this handbook are based on a variety of research and data collection efforts. A survey of planners in the South Bay cities was conducted to better understand the existing barriers and opportunities for livable communities strategies. A survey was mailed to each of the cities to obtain information such as the areas likely to experience redevelopment, existing livable communities strategies, and impediments to such strategies. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with planners in a number of the cities to clarify survey responses and probe certain issues. Planning documents such as plans and city codes from several cities were also reviewed. This survey is documented in Appendix A.

A survey of other cities in the Western U.S. was conducted to identify livable communities strategies that have been successful in places with an urban form similar to the South Bay. Telephone interviews were conducted with planners in 35 communities. The interviews focused on identifying policy strategies to achieve livable communities (including incentive programs), design guidelines, and specific projects that provide lessons for the implementation of livable communities concepts. This survey is detailed in Appendix B.

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A series of interview was conducted with Southern California developers in order to better understand what cities can do to encourage private sector investment. Five developers were selected, all of whom have recently been involved in mixed use or infill housing development in the South Bay. The telephone interviews focused on the types of incentives that are effective at promoting the development mixed use, infill housing, and pedestrian-oriented retail. This survey is documented in Appendix C.

Finally, various documents were reviewed throughout the project. These include the plans, design guidelines, and municipal code sections collected in the various survey efforts, as well as more general documents covering pedestrian-oriented, transit-oriented and mixed-use urban design. A variety of literature on the transportation and environmental benefits of livable communities was also reviewed. These documents are listed in the References.

REPORT ORGANIZATION

This handbook is organized into five chapters.

- Chapter 2 presents land use and urban design strategies for Arterial Commercial Strips. It describes how this typical urban form can be made more livable through changes to land use, building design, sidewalks, parking and streets.
- Chapter 3 presents land use and design strategies for Light Industrial Areas.
- Chapter 4 identifies the implementation tools that South Bay cities can use to achieve changes in land use and design, including parking regulations, developer incentives, changes to the zoning and the permitting process, and funding sources.
- Chapter 5 discusses the transportation and environmental benefits of livable communities. It highlights a variety of research studies that show how factors such as density, land use mixing, urban design and transit access can reduce automobile use. The air quality benefits and the environmental benefits of reductions to the urban heat island effect through the use of trees are also discussed.